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## WHAT WAS THEIR UTOPIA?

*Lady Augusta Gregory*

For many days the road that leads north, to Galway, was barricaded and held by armed men; the railroad that leads to Dublin had been torn up, the telegraph poles had been cut and the wires flung over walls. For news we were dependent on rumour, vague, alarming, for the most part false. When newspapers came again they told that the rising had been put down, and the chief among the leaders shot.

Since then the papers have been as full of rumours as had been our roads; rumours of plans “for the better governance of Ireland”. Perhaps these are known in London today, for the Prime Minister was to speak yesterday. But that news has not reached us yet; we only know he has been asking counsel, opinion, from men on one or the other side. That is a wise thing to do; and is it not a great pity it is too late to hear from their own lips what was the plan of government made for Ireland by those leaders who are dead? One would so gladly hear it; for these men who proclaimed their promise to all the citizens of Ireland of “religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities”; who promised “to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation equally”, must certainly have shaped some scheme in detail by which to work out these general principles. One desires to know by what means, by what reasoning they had meant to bring Ulster and Connacht into friendship; how so to enforce law as to bring the serenity of order into a long disordered land; how so to use their “Science and Poetry and Thought” to

“make the lot  
“Of the dwellers in a cot  
“Such they curse their neighbour not”

For as Shelley says: “In men who suffer for political crimes there is a large mixture of enterprise and fortitude and disinterestedness, and the elements, though misguided and disarranged by which the strength and happiness of a nation might have been cemented”. And these men, Irish and living in Ireland, living in this vision, this idea, must certainly have given to it an intensity of thought to which politicians can hardly attain. One covets to know the ground plan of their Republic, their Jerusalem, their Utopia; of how they would have attained to Milton’s aim that must be the aim of every Free Commonwealth to

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1. Text deleted: Might not this evidence yet be taken from told by one of the companionship who is not yet upon the threshold of punishment, John O'Neill?

“make the people fittest to choose, and the chosen fittest to govern”; and all the more if we admit for them Whitman’s proud claim for their “visions the visions of poets, the most solid announcements of any”. We covet to know once again in this generation what was the poet[’]s Utopia. For these men were certainly poets. MacDonagh’s verses are the best known:

“Oh for the storms again, and youth in my heart again  
 My spirit to glory strained, wild in this wild wood then  
 That now shall ne[’]r strain; though I think if the tempest should roll  
 I could rise and strive with death, and smite him back from my soul”.

There is rhythm in his play *When the Dawn is Come*, put on by us at the Abbey Theatre. It has for its subject the close of a revolt, and one of the leaders, Thurlough, said in the stage direction to be “under thirty years” brings the terms offered by the enemy: “Full freedom in our land with our laws and governance, under the foreign crown, with a joint council of their state and ours”. An old man, Hugh, says “It is all we ask”. Thurlough goes on “But there is more. We may not war on any; they guard our trade; we may not tax their goods. (throwing papers on table) Here are the terms, almost the same as our fathers won, nearly two hundred years ago—and lost by fraud.”

“HUGH: In God’s name let us take them lest we get no others.

“THURLOUGH: It is not well to claim the name of God for one side or the other. They offered terms before we armed; if we had taken them in any name we had not got these”.

The old man still pleads, begs him not to speak against our peace. “You are young. I who am old remember the hard times when men dared not to look for this. I then was young and fought for this”.

But Thurlough answers: “Father, the father of our army and this land, and my dear friend, you do remember well. But memory at best is a troubled thing. You were young once and fought for this. In those days too, were old men who had fought for less. And in their young days still others old who had fought—why, for less still. So back to the day when the tide was full before, and old men and young men fought for all—as we shall fight—for all. The old men of your young fighting days said of you: “He is young; he will be yet like us. If he had known the bad days of our youth he would take less”; and you are old and I am young. I may grow old—who knows?—and may see young men fighting for more than now I claim”.

MacDonough [sic] died young, and one thinks of other words of the play. “To save my life? To lengthen on this part of life I know? What if our lives are here but just begun—’tis your creed Father—here but begun, elsewhere accomplished—if what seems broken here be but part-hidden by the cloud of

death—. Half builded here and curst, perchance full moulded in the eternal night! Life, but a fragment here, beyond shall be achieved...” And again: “Men, passing, see not in the light of their own day the truth of their own day. So is still revered the martyr-blood that once was traitor blood”.

I have here a little book [of] verse by P. H. Pearse.<sup>2</sup> It was given by Pearse to Mr. Yeats, and being in Irish, by him to me. I do not find in it anything of war or revolt or politics; the sadness of parting comes into it, and the darkness of “the earth-grey house”. Last night I put English on one of the poems, a mountain woman’s lullaby to her child, the ‘little candle of her house’, and read it to the little ones upstairs going to bed, and they were pleased with it and listened as it went on:

“O little mouth that sucks at my breast  
It is Mary herself will kiss you on your road.

“O little wise face as soft as silk  
It is Christ will lay his fair hand upon you.

“The kiss of Mary on the mouth of my babe;  
The hand of Christ on my little babe’s head.

“Be silent house; and you little grey mice  
Stay quiet tonight within in your holes.

“Moths on the window shut up your wings;  
Quiet O flies your humming and buzzing!

“Plover and curlew travelling past my house  
Do not cry out going over the mountain!

“O tribes of the mountain that wakened so early  
Do not stir this night till the shining of the sun!”

Many of the verses are concerned with children:

“I never gathered gold;  
The praise I got faded;  
In love I found trouble  
That withered my life.

“Riches or fame  
I will not find at the last,  
(What I have O God is enough!)  
But my name in the heart of a child”.

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2. Text revised from “a little book of Pearse’s Irish poems.”

But there is one rather stern little poem on Ireland:

“I am Eire:  
Older I than the Hag of Beara.

“Great my boast:  
I gave birth to brave Cuchulain.

“Great my shame:  
My own children sold their mother.

“I am Eire:  
Lonelier than the Hag Beara”.

John MacNeill, yet on the threshold of freedom or punishment, has through many unselfish years served Irish scholarship well, helping the learned with his learning and making known to the unlearned in translation the noble “Lays of Finn”:

“Listen to the prophesy of Finn. A vision of shapes has appeared to me, has reft me of my strength and my reason.

“It is not this that grieves me, but the number of the grey-faced foreigners here, and that I and the Fianna will not be living, and I myself driving them out.

“The foreigners garden will be here, and many a tree a-planting; and herbs a-putting down and coming up from their roots.

The Irish will rise hardily, alike in east and north and south; it grieves me that it may not be myself who will come when the shout of the men will be raised”.

Finn lived before history was written, and his mother was a daughter of the gods; yet the lament of one of his people left after him must be in some hearts today:

“Henceforth I can but sorrow since the sons of Treanmor are gone; my glory and beauty have departed; my strength, my hosts, my household”.

Now that Germany, thank God, can never gain a foothold here, I would humbly pray that John MacNeill be asked, as representing those leaders who are gone, to give full testimony as to the plan, the project, in which they had put their faith. It may be it would give some common meeting ground for all, as well the patient as the passionate, who wish our country well. And there would

be a compelling force behind it; for is it not the custom in Ireland as in tragedy for the victory to remain with the dead?

A. Gregory  
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May 16.